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ABSTRACT

Bucks County Community College's Department of Basic Studies is a comprehensive developmental education program which involves work for credit in basic academic skills--reading and study skills, writing and mathematics. In addition, special counseling is given to students in order to change negative habits and attitudes, and to develop a more positive self-image. During the 1973-74 academic year, a study was conducted to determine the effect of the Basic Studies Program. Students included in the study ranked in the bottom 40 percent of their high school graduating class and scored at the 25th percentile or below on the Comparative Guidance and Placement Test. This study contrasts 86 students participating in the Basic Studies Program (experimental group) with 97 nonparticipants (control group). The average GPA earned by the experimental group was 2.285, while the control group earned an average GPA of 1.77, a difference which was statistically significant. While 75 (87 percent) of the experimental group participants returned to Bucks for the fall 1974 semester, only 59 (61 percent) of the control group returned. The experimental group also proved to be more successful in English Composition I and mathematics than the control group. They more frequently earned grades of "C" or better, and showed more persistence. Tables of data are appended. (NHM)

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EFFECTS OF THE BASIC STUDIES PROGRAM ON THE SCHOLASTIC PERFORMANCE OF A SELECTED GROUP OF LOW-ACHIEVING STUDENTS ENROLLED AT BUCKS COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DURING THE 1973 - 1974 ACADEMIC YEAR

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February 14, 1975

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Introduction

Increasingly during the decade of the 60's the United States saw the emergence of a new type of educational institution, the community college. Often called democracies college, the community college opened its doors to anyone desiring a post-secondary school education. Thus, many non-traditional students who were not prepared to pursue regular collegiate programs of study, but who sought a chance to receive a college education, were permitted to enroll there (Roueche & Kirk, 1973).

While philosophically the concept of the community college is sound, it became increasingly apparent at Bucks County Community College that the "open door" admissions policy was in reality more a demonstration of the "revolving door" phenomenon. This has consistently been demonstrated by the fact that between forty and fifty percent of our student body is inadequately prepared to meet successfully the challenge of the collegiate milieu. A high percentage of these find college too difficult and withdraw before completing their first year (Rosella, 1970; Licopoli, 1970; 1973).

Initially, attempts at reducing this high attrition rate amongst our "high-risk" students were made by establishing non-credit remedial reading, English and mathematics courses. This approach did help some students, however, no significant reductions were found in over-all attrition rates (Licopoli, 1973).

A search of the literature showed that many colleges were becoming more aware of the problems faced by "high-risk" students; however, no one offered any immediate solutions to the problem. Several researchers on the other hand, were able to demonstrate the importance of several factors that would have to be recognized before colleges could effectively help these non-traditional students to succeed. One study showed that the self-concept development of students was of primary importance (Ankenbrand, 1972). A second study that compared "successful" programs with "unsuccessful" ones recommended the establishment of comprehensive developmental programs that strongly emphasized personal, educational and vocational counseling (Rouche & Kirk, 1973). A third study pointed to the importance of properly identifying students who could be helped by special programs (DeVecchio, 1972).

After a careful review of all available information, Bucks County Community College initiated a comprehensive developmental education program during the 1972-73 academic year by creating the Department of Basic Studies. A program was developed to include work in basic academic skills -- reading and study skills, writing and mathematics. In addition, special counseling is given to students in order to change negative habits and attitudes and to develop a more positive self-image (Maltz, 1961). This program also began to offer academic credit which could be applied towards the Associate of Arts degree -- a move away from the "you should have learned those skills when you were in high school" idea, so prevalent amongst faculty and institutions that continue to follow more traditional philosophies.

Purpose

The purpose of the present study, conducted during the 1973-74 academic year, is to determine the effect of the Basic Studies Program on selected students admitted to Bucks County Community College who ranked in the lowest forty-percent of their high school class.

Specifically, the study was designed to measure the following factors:

1) Grade Point Average (GPA).

2) Persistence in College.

3) Success in specific courses -- English Composition I and higher mathematics.

Selection Procedures

The College Admissions Office provided the Basic Studies Department with the records of 385 students who ranked in the bottom forty-percent of their high school graduating class.

The following selection guidelines were adopted.

1. Lack of college preparatory high school program (i.e., no science, mathematics and foreign language).

2. Over-all average of "C" or less with poor grades in English, mathematics and other courses requiring good reading and study skills (e.g., history, sociology, etc.).

3. Comparative Guidance and Placement Test (CGP) scores in reading, sentences, vocabulary and mathematics at the 25th percentile or below.

4. A CGP academic motivation score below the 50th percentile.

5. Predictions for success in specific academic programs and courses as indicated on the CGP test report.

6. An in depth counseling interview to help determine whether the preceding guidelines adequately measured each student's true capabilities.

Preliminary screening was conducted and 98 of the 385 students originally selected did not meet our selection criteria. The remaining 287 did meet our criteria. From this group 142 students were randomly selected to become part of our Experimental Group, (received treatment). These students were interviewed during the summer (1973) by members of the Basic Studies Department faculty. The remaining 145 students became our Control Group (received no special treatment). Regular college faculty (with no training in counseling) advised these students and were requested not to make any special effort to enroll them in Basic Studies courses; however, no student desiring these courses was denied enrollment.

A number of students were dropped from both the Experimental and Control Groups for the following reasons: they did not attend college, they enrolled as part-time students, they did not select the Basic Studies Program or they were members of the Control Group who selected the Basic Studies Program.

As a result, 86 students selected the Basic Studies Program.

Treatment

Students in the Experimental Group enrolled in at least two Basic Studies courses. In addition to work in accademic skill

areas -- reading and study-skills, writing and mathematics -- they also received counseling by members of the Basic Studies Department faculty (all are professionally trained psychological counselors) thoughout their freshman year. Thus heavy emphasis was placed on the affective as well as the cognitve development of students. Topics covered during individual and group sessions included self-concept improvement, exploring career objectives and attitude change. To achieve these goals several therapeutic modalities were combined in order to modify self-defeating behaviors.

Relaxation training to reduce anxiety in specific situations, reinforcement contingences, systematic desensitization procedures and assertive training were most frequently utilized in both group and individual settings (Wolpe, 1958; 1973).

Other methods designed to change behavior were employed when appropriate. Specifically, several of these are as follows:

1) Maxwell Maltz's (1961) psychocybernetics philosophy has been utilized in helping students form a more positive self-image. This was employed extensively in classroom situations.

2) Tugender and Ferinden's (1972) techniques of Hypno-Operant Conditioning were found useful in combination with Wolpe's behavior therapy techniques. Here training in hypnosis and self-hypnosis was primarily utilized to "speed up" the learning process or to bring about change more quickly through the use of suggestion and visual imagery.

3) Finally, Rudolph Dreikurs (1967) methods of Individual Psychology or those of Carl Rogers (1961) were employed when behavior therapy or hypnotic techniques made the students feel uncomfortable. In these cases we worked with them on an individual basis (in a "less threatening" manner) until they appeared ready to deal with their problems more directly and were able to accept the fact that they could control their negative habits and attitudes through modifying certain behaviors.

Results

Students who were admitted to the Basic Studies Program (Experimental Group), earned a higher grade point average, had a greater rate of persistence and were more successful in English Composition I and mathematics courses than the Control Group.

More specifically, the average GPA earned by the Experimental Group was 2.285. The Control Group earned a GPA of 1.77. The difference proved to be statistically significant (Table 1). Seventy-five (87%) of our original 86 Experimental Group participants returned to Bucks for the Fall, 1974 semester. Our Control Group did not fare as well. Out of ninety-seven participants, fifty-nine (61%) returned to College for the Fall, 1974 semester (Table 2).

Finally, Basic Studies students proved to be more successful in English Composition I (Table 3) and mathematics (Table 4) than did the Control Group. More students earned a grade of "C" or better in these subjects, experienced fewer failures and showed a greater degree of persistence.

Conclusion

Basic Studies students did better in all categories measured. The evidence appears to strongly point to the generalized effect of the program rather than to any particular course. Individual counseling and the availability of instructors for special help, the utilization of non-traditional teaching techniques and the general non-punitive and positive atmosphere created in the

classroom seem to be important factors contributing to the results of this study.

Discussion

The data obtained in comparing the Experimental and Control Groups clearly suggest that the Counseling Approach, mentioned herein, was effective in helping academic low-achieving students who received help to earn significantly higher grades in college, to continue to pursue college studies and to do better in English Composition I. More of these students were also accepting the challenge of studying mathematics courses.

Separating developmental reading, writing and mathematics from the traditional academic departments and creating a special department to serve the needs of todays "new" student appears to be working at Bucks County Community College. However, our studies show that some refining of the present program is still necessary particularly in offering appropriate courses and in our selection procedures.

Our research and personal experiences have also demonstrated to us that the non-traditional student who is presently pursuing higher education cannot be treated in the same way that educators taught students in past years since many of today's students would never have attempted college a decade ago.

Many traditionally-oriented educators still continue to view developmental programs in a condescending way. They believe that courses offered to the "new" student should prepare

them to enter the "regular" college classroom. Rarely are traditional educators willing to examine the teaching methods that they employ to see whether or not what they are doing might somehow be improved in order to better teach and motivate students how to learn.

Methods previously perceived beneath the dignity of a college must now be employed. Such things as granting academic credit for developmental courses, hiring specially trained instructors (rather than assigning the junior department members) to teach reading, writing and mathematics courses, providing specialized counseling, utilizing audio-visual and individual learning programs, creating separate college departments -- where the efforts of a developmental program may be coordinated, and many other innovative approaches must be used if we are to provide a post secondary education for these "new" students who are now entering our colleges.

Hopefully, the positive results of this study will encourage others to attempt similar programs.

TABLE 1

Comparison of Grade Point Averages, Credits Attempted and Credits Earned between the Experimental and Control Groups.

Group	Mean GPA	Credits Attempted	Credits Earned
Experimental	2.285	23	22
Control	1.77	20	18
Difference	.515	3	4

The difference between the averages of the two groups proved to be highly significant ($t = 4.13$, $P < .001$).

TABLE 2

Persistence in College Between Experimental and Control Groups

		Experimental Group Number N=86	Percentage[1] 100%	Control Group Number N=97	Percentage 100%
Attrition By Semester	1st	7	8%	22	23%
	2nd	5	6%	16	16%
Total Dropping[2]		12	13%	38	39%
Registered for Fall '74 Semester		75	87%	59	61%

[1]Percentages rounded to nearest whole number.

[2]Transferred to another college: Experimental Group 4 (5%); Control Group 6 (6%).

TABLE 3

Success Rates for Grades Earned in English Composition I.

Study Group	Successful[2]		Currently Enrolled	Never Enrolled
	Yes	No		
Experimental[1]	32	15	10	28[3]
Control	37	31	4	25

[1]One student received an I grade and was not included as either successful or unsuccessful.

[2]Students earning a C grade or better were considered successful, D's, F's, WP's and WF's are classified for purposes of this study as unsuccessful.

[3]Most of these completed College Reading and Basic Writing. Reasons for not enrolling in English Composition I are not apparent at this time.

TABLE 4

Success Rates for Grades Earned in Advanced Mathematics Courses.[1]

Study Group	Successful[2]		Currently Enrolled	Enrolled in Intermediate Algebra
	Yes	No		
Experimental	5	4	14	15
Control	7	9	4	0

[1]Business mathematics has been excluded from this study.

[2]Students earning a C grade or better were considered successful, D's, F's, WP's and WF's are classified for purposes of this study as unsuccessful.

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